

IMPROVING SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM

National PTA recognizes that proper nutrition is imperative to the health, development and academic achievement of children, and that students receive a significant portion of their daily nutritional needs from school, which for a majority includes breakfast and lunch. In 2018, roughly 4.9 billion lunches were served to 30.4 million children that participated in the National School Lunch program, with approximately 74% of participants receiving free or reduced-price lunches, and almost half of those students consuming breakfast at school.

Proper nutrition is the cornerstone of a child's health, well-being and balance. Unfortunately, in many cases, if a student arrives late for school, they do not have an opportunity to participate in breakfast after the bell, which can lead to lack of focus and attention. Food insecurity is linked to lower reading and math scores, falling behind peers academically and socially, and may lead to increased risk of behavioral issues, such as anxiety, hyperactivity and aggression. National PTA is keenly aware that food insecurity, faced by 14 million children, is exacerbated by meal debt policies that shame and stigmatize.

Guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and U.S. Department of Agriculture indicate that scheduling recess before lunch—and providing at least 20 minutes of seated time to eat a meal—leads to increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, decreased food waste, reduced discipline referrals and increased academic performance. Due to competing demands for time during the school day, lunch periods have been shortened and students are rushed through their lunch period, often throwing food away or bringing it home in their lunchbox, uneaten at the end of the day.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 requires each Local Educational Agency participating in the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast Program to have a wellness policy that promotes student well-being and ability to learn.

National PTA supports and advocates for legislation and wellness policies which: 1) include measurable goals and standards regarding child nutrition 2) ensure sufficient time for students to receive and consume a meal 3) provide for recess opportunities.

National PTA strongly opposes the practice of meal debt policies that shame or humiliate students—or prevent children from receiving a full meal equivalent to their peers.

National PTA must be engaged in ongoing policy-making decisions to expand equitable access to school meals, including programs that increase meal availability and allow our voice to be raised to speak on behalf of meal availability for all students.

Adopted by the 2020 National PTA Board of Directors